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ABSTRACT

Comparisons between 35 small/rural K-12 Kansas school districts (900 students or fewer) and 642 similar districts nationwide use data gathered during 1982-83. Qualifying Kansas districts (208, enrolling 95,466 students) were identified, to be compared to 4,125 qualifying districts nationwide. A questionnaire mailed to superintendents of 36 randomly-selected Kansas districts and 816 randomly-selected districts nationwide achieved respective response rates of 97.2% and 78.7%. A 3-page table compares data from the Kansas and national surveys in sections on the district, superintendent, teachers, student performance, and school programs. For example, teachers are compared in terms of average numbers of elementary teachers in district (Kansas: 17.1, national: 14.4); average number of secondary teachers in district (17.4, 15.7); average teacher/student ratio (1:11.8, 1:14.5); percent teacher turnover, 1981-82 (8.9%, 8.6%); mean beginning teacher salary, 1982-83 ($11,948, $12,492); mean top teacher salary, 1982-83 ($20,472, $20,506); mean current teacher salary, 1982-83 ($16,129, $16,377): average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule (11.4, 14.5); and average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers (3.6, 3.5). (MH)

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A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN KANSAS COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Kansas State Department of Education
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KANSAS

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Kansas enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Thirty-five districts were surveyed in Kansas; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN KANSAS COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Kansas with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Kansas, 208 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 67.8 percent of the state's 307

operating public school districts and enrolled 95,466 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 36 districts in Kansas, of which 35 responded (97.2 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Kansas with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

Kansas is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Kansas educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN KANSAS AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Kansas	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	425	436
2. Average number of schools per district	2.0	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	156.7	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	309	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	58.7	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	19.1	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	2.9	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$1,140,600	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	91.2	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	22.9	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	50.9	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	73.4	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	14.3	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	11.4	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	6.3	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	48.6	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	65.7	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	34.3	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	22.9	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	17.1	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	17.4	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:11.8	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1981-82)	8.9	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$11,948	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$20,472	$20,506
7. Mean Current teacher salary (1982-83)	$16,129	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Kansas	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	11.4	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers	3.6	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	33.3	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	0.3	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	7.6	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	2.0	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	50.5	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	12.3	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	57.1	86.6
School Counselor	85.7	79.4
School Psychologist	51.4	33.8
School Nurse	51.4	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	68.6	80.9
Adult Education Director	0	22.0
Community Education Director	0	7.8
Vocational Education Director	17.1	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	100	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	8.6	55.4
Softball	2.9	37.1
Volleyball	85.7	65.7
Cross Country Track	42.9	23.3
Soccer	2.9	7.0
Wrestling	17.1	25.2
Track and Field	97.1	78.7
Golf	28.6	22.4
Tennis	5.7	16.3
Swimming	2.9	3.2
Gymnastics	0	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Kansas	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	42.9	41.8
German	14.3	9.7
French	25.7	18.9
Calculus	40.0	35.9
Chemistry	82.9	79.4
Computer Science	80.0	60.3
Electronics	5.7	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	45.7	63.1
Physics	65.7	67.7

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